5 TECH TRENDS DRIVING SUCCESS FOR INTERNAL MEDICINE PRACTICES
Internists play a pivotal role in our healthcare system, but it is becoming increasingly difficult for internal medicine practices to stay profitable. Mounting industry pressures like declining reimbursements, escalating costs, ICD-10, and growing administrative burdens are distracting physicians from patient care and causing widespread physician dissatisfaction. In fact, in Deloitte’s 2013 Survey of U.S. Physicians, primary care providers emerged as the least satisfied with practicing medicine (41% dissatisfied).¹

As internists look for ways to gain footing, taking steps like adopting new technologies or replacing legacy systems are key to reducing administrative burdens and freeing up time for patient care. In the following report, you’ll learn about five critical technologies that help internists run their practices more efficiently, profitably, and enjoyably.

With cloud-based solutions, internists gain three key benefits:

- **The software is accessible with just a computer and internet connection**, so there are no expensive hardware purchases or yearly maintenance fees required. As a result, practices avoid the hefty up-front and long-term ownership costs typically associated with client-server systems.

- **Cloud-based software delivers automatic updates that integrate seamlessly with the system**, so practices avoid losing productivity to long downloads or trouble-shooting phone calls. In addition to being simple, cloud-based updates are also more affordable (and often free).

- **Users can access cloud-based software 24/7**, at home or on the go, so they can get their work done where and when it works best for them.

Cloud-based solutions have the potential to reduce operating costs, keep practices current with less hassle, and boost internists’ productivity both inside and outside of the office.

---

Internists bear some of the heaviest administrative burdens in the medical field, as almost one third spend 15 or more hours per week on paperwork and administrative activities. This is causing significant burnout: over 40% of internists are experiencing burnout with “too many bureaucratic tasks” and “spending too many hours at work” the top drivers. As a result, it’s critical for them to maximize efficiency. While well-designed practice management and EHR systems generate efficiency gains by themselves, the benefits are magnified when these systems are integrated. Here’s how:

- **Physicians and staff avoid productivity losses from having to enter the same information** (e.g., updated contact information) in two separate systems. Truly integrated systems link smoothly so data entered in one populates in the other. The result? Users complete their work more efficiently, leaving less room for error.

- **An integrated system is often a more cost-effective choice**, especially since it allows practices to avoid constructing an interface between separate systems.

- **Practices have a single source for customer service.** In addition to streamlining the initial service experience (e.g., implementation, training), there is no back-and-forth between vendors, so questions get resolved more quickly.

Every minute that technology frees up for internists is a minute they can reallocate to patient care or their own personal well-being. When they opt for an integrated system, they not only recover the time they’ve been losing, but they also reduce stress levels through fewer system issues and a better service experience.

---

When Affordable Care Act (ACA) provisions bring an influx of 30 million newly insured individuals into the U.S. healthcare system next year, internists will be among the providers most affected. However, resource constraints will make it hard for many to take on new patients, despite their desire to do so. In fact, 48% of the primary care providers surveyed in the 2013 CareCloud/QuantiaMD Practice Profitability Index reported that they lack the resources needed to take on ACA patients.\(^5\) In the struggle to do more with less, patient portals can be powerful aids for practices to drive better outcomes and heighten efficiency. They are especially promising for internists due to the scope and duration of the care they provide to their patients.

With patient portals, internal medicine practices gain key capabilities that lead to stronger patient engagement:

- **Patients have access to their health records online**, including lab results, so they can ask more informed questions and have tangible data to track as they work to improve their own health (e.g., vitals signs over time). Practices also cut down on phone calls related to lab results when patients view them online.

- **Patients schedule appointments and submit prescription refill request online**, reducing incoming calls to the practice. This “self-service” option eases a practice’s administrative burden and lets patients perform key health-related tasks in a more convenient, quick, and private way.

- **Patients and doctors can exchange messages securely online**, allowing them to connect with ease. This strengthens the physician-patient relationship and reduces hassle for both parties (e.g., phone calls, stacks of messages, interruptions).

Despite these benefits, these tools are still under-utilized. In a 2013 Deloitte survey, only 24% of physicians said their patients could schedule visits or access test results on the web and only 19% said patients could request prescription refills online. As industry changes stretch providers even thinner, patient engagement tools have the potential to drive both efficiency and outcomes by making patients more proactive about their health.
LEVERAGING MOBILE SOLUTIONS TO ACCOMPLISH MORE ON-THE-GO.

The number of physicians working on tablet devices rises each year, recently reaching 72% (the iPad being the most popular), according to Manhattan Research. In addition to accessing EHRs and making notes on the go, physicians are using tablets for various other activities, including checking their schedules, sending emails, and educating patients. Given that internists have such heavy patient loads—half see over 75 patients per week—they are particularly poised to benefit from getting more work done in real-time rather than accumulating a pile of to-dos for the end of the day.

With mobile solutions, internists can gain key benefits, such as:

- **Improved workflow**: in a recent survey, 74% of healthcare providers said their tablet improved workflow.

- **Higher productivity**: the same survey showed that healthcare professionals using tablets gained 1.2 hours per day. Relatedly, 86% reported that their tablet makes them better multi-taskers.

- **Collaboration**: 66% of providers said the tablet helps increase collaboration amongst colleagues.

Physicians have also found mobile technologies helpful for presenting images and animations to their patients, thus enhancing patient education. As the demands on internists’ time continue to grow, mobile technologies have the potential to play an important role in helping them improve both productivity and patient care.

---


While the best systems provide data in a whole host of areas, the three key categories are:

- **Billing**: robust solutions can answer an array of questions that help internists benchmark results, identify issues, and track results over time. Possible questions include: How is my A/R trending? Have I collected more money so far this year versus last year? How effective is my practice at securing payment on first submission?

- **Operations**: systems that include operational data can help internists ascertain where the practice is functioning well and where it’s falling short. Key questions might include: How quickly are my staff billing after patient visits? Which providers are seeing the most (and least) patients? Has my practice managed to reduce cancellations?

- **Clinical & Patient-Related**: these reports can include a variety of data about clinical trends and patient characteristics. Key questions might include: Which codes am I using the most? What do my patient demographics look like? What is the breakdown of preventive vs. sick visits for each provider in my practice?

“Business Analytics” can mean many different things, but in the context of internal medicine practices, well-designed analytics tools can help internists make data-driven decisions that improve practice performance. Armed with actionable insights, internists can take appropriate actions to boost their efficiency and profitability. Given that roughly one in five internists belongs to an ACO, data access is even more critical for them, as they need to assess and report on performance, while also identifying areas for improvement.

While the best systems provide data in a whole host of areas, the three key categories are:

- **Billing**: robust solutions can answer an array of questions that help internists benchmark results, identify issues, and track results over time. Possible questions include: How is my A/R trending? Have I collected more money so far this year versus last year? How effective is my practice at securing payment on first submission?

- **Operations**: systems that include operational data can help internists ascertain where the practice is functioning well and where it’s falling short. Key questions might include: How quickly are my staff billing after patient visits? Which providers are seeing the most (and least) patients? Has my practice managed to reduce cancellations?

- **Clinical & Patient-Related**: these reports can include a variety of data about clinical trends and patient characteristics. Key questions might include: Which codes am I using the most? What do my patient demographics look like? What is the breakdown of preventive vs. sick visits for each provider in my practice?

When considering the need for data, internists must bear in mind that data alone is not enough. Systems that deliver on their potential do more than house data; they make it easy to access specific data of interest and present it in visually appealing ways. The right tools make it simple for internists to keep an ongoing pulse on their practices and consistently incorporate data into their decision-making.

Conclusion

While an array of exciting technologies have emerged in recent years, we narrowed this list down to those with the greatest potential to boost the efficiency and profitability of internal medicine practices, while raising internists’ overall satisfaction. Cloud-based technologies, integrated PM-EHR systems, patient portals, mobile technologies, and business analytics tools can have a meaningful impact on internists’ work and lives—and truly deliver on the promise of technology.

CareCloud is a leading provider of web-based practice management, revenue cycle management, electronic health record (EHR), and medical billing software and services for medical groups. The company’s products are connecting providers to one another – and to their patients – through a fully integrated digital healthcare ecosystem that can be accessed on any browser or device.

CareCloud is helping thousands of physicians to increase collections, streamline operations and improve patient care in 45 states. The company was named a winner of IBM’s SmartCamp Silicon Valley 2010 for its innovative technology and has raised $44 million in VC funding from Intel Capital, Norwest Venture Partners, and Tenaya Capital. To learn more about CareCloud, please visit www.carecloud.com.

1-877-342-7519 – hello@carecloud.com